world. I am aware that this is a controversial call in an age in which the social sciences—echoing the phenomenal incoherence, the sheer complexity, of the contemporary order of things, its tendency toward the anti-systemic, the contingent, rupture, and disorder—have tended to turn their back on theory. And to seek succor in ever more exquisite forms of neo-empiricism; in anthropology, my own discipline, this has been accompanied by a return to the search for pristine, de-historicized cultures, now rebranded as the "ontological turn," which we wisely gave up on some decades ago. But to give up on "doing theory" in this way, to suffice ourselves by merely describing the world as we and/or our "natives" see it, is to give up on the essential gesture of critical social knowledge: namely, to account for the connections between the visible and the invisible, to plumb the forces that lie unseen behind the tumult, the cacophony, the contingent in the phenomenology of our everyday lives, forces that make that world at once inequitable, violent, and catastrophe-prone, at once obscenely rich in its benevolence and punishingly poor in withholding its bounty, at once progressive and retrogressive, at once remarkably stable and wildly labile. It is to this endeavor that *Theory from the South* sought, modestly, to join itself.

Liberal Revolutions and the African Future
An Interview with Keith Hart

Economic anthropologist Keith Hart (**KH**), *one of the leading figures in African studies, spoke to* Social Transformations *editor Lisandro Claudio* (**LC**) *to discuss the future of African regionalism. Hart, a Centennial Professor of Economic Anthropology at the London School of Economics and Political Science, has recently co-edited with John Sharp the volume,* People, Money and Power in the Economic Crisis: Perspectives from the Global South *(New York: Berghahn Books, 2014). The interview took place in Copenhagen in November 2014.*

LC: So let's start with the first question I ask anyone I interview for the journal: What is the Global South for you?

KH: Not the North, that's all really. Having lived as long as I have, I have seen transformations in these terminologies. The South is Latin America as seen from North America and Africa as seen from Europe; but the whole of Asia doesn't fit into that directional logic. Asia has made a successful transition from colonialism to national capitalism, which is not the case for most of Africa. It's quite a problematic terminology but I'm happy to use it. Obviously if I'm sitting inside Africa I have no problem saying I'm in the South. I have a book coming out (edited with John Sharp for Berghahn Books), *People, Money and Power in the Economic Crisis: Perspectives from the Global South*. I'm willing to use it, but I don't really want to put much effort into defining it.

LC: So why do you still use it even if you think it's problematic?

KH: In terms of the research program that I organize (the Human Economy Program at the University of Pretoria, South Africa), it is very clear who is from the North and who is not. You know that post-Cold War Europe and North America are on a very different trajectory than for example people from Southern Africa. And the idea of the South reminds us to take account of that difference.

LC: Were you more comfortable with the term "Third World" before?

KH: Yes I was, because it was the Cold War blocs—America and its allies, the USSR and its allies—and the rest. I thought that it described well the whole non-aligned movement from Bandung and the rest of it. You knew what we were talking about at that time—Asia, Latin America, or Africa. No problem with it.

LC: So if the Global South is not as useful, what happens after the Third World? What's heir to that term that represents a politics useful for global solidarity?

KH: Obviously we're forced to use the South because there is no alternative. I'm not that much against it; it is just that I have never given much thought to defining it because it obscures the growing difference between Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

LC: Let's talk about Africa then, because it is where you specialize. You argue in your work that Africa is in a critical conjuncture now.

And you are making provocative predictions about Africa's future. So what will happen to Africa in the future?

KH: The main thing that will happen to Africa is that its population will go through a gigantic explosion in the remaining decades of this century. Secondly, it seems to me inevitable that the purchasing power of Africans will increase. And so I think Asian manufacturers understand that in the twenty-first century, Africa is going to be essential to growth in the world market.

LC: And what are the implications of that going to be with respect to Western capital?

KH: The fact is that Western capital is complacent and rather detached from what is going on in Africa. They seem to be kind of locked into a model of mining and extraction.

LC: So are investments in the future of Africa going to be basically the West competing with China or is it more complex?

KH: I think the chief competitors are the United States and China, and secondarily Europe. The United States formed its first United Africa Command a few years ago and they defined it as operating from the Sahara desert in Algeria as far as Somalia. If you look at that line, it is designed to keep the Europeans out. And, to some extent, to resist the Chinese incursions too. At the moment, the imperialist powers most active in Africa are the Americans, the French, and the Chinese.

LC: How would you distinguish between these three imperialisms?

KH: America's is based on military preponderance. The United States has a very serious reactionary commitment. The French and the Americans have been involved in reactionary coups in Central African Republic and Mali. It was never widely understood that the Americans pulled off an amazing coup in substituting Kabila for Mobutu, basically handing over the Eastern Congo to Rwanda and Ugandan generals organized by Museveni and Kagame.

The Americans were ever really held responsible for that. It was an alliance between them and the South Africans. Mugabe was the gun-

runner to Kabila in Katanga, and Museveni launched his Rwandan generals. The nature of this alliance never got the publicity that it deserved. Of course the French were deeply put out because they lost heavily in Rwanda. It even became an English-speaking country.

And for a time the French got involved with the Nigerians who also felt that they had a legitimate strategic interest in the Congo. But now the French have jumped into bed with the Americans. That particular alliance is no longer so important.

The strategic future of Africa lies in the Congo, which is not just a mineral rich place. The fact is that the Congo was a developed society in the nineteenth century. Even during Belgian colonialism, there were more engineers in the Congo than anywhere else in Africa. They are a well-educated people. South Africa obviously has a direct interest in the Congo, and I do think the future will be fought over the Congo. It is still a very large country as well.

LC: Can you speak a little bit about Western anxieties in Africa relative to China now?

KH: I don't know who's anxious. In many countries of Southern Africa, governments have found it easier to deal with Chinese traders than to develop their own businessmen. That is for several reasons, including the fact that they can rip off foreigners more easily. But also if they develop a business class, an indigenous business class, these people become potential supporters of political opponents.

Governments are extremely comfortable about inviting Chinese participation in their economies, but there are lots of local interest groups involved, most especially the indigenous business classes.

LC: I want to move on to a discussion of revolutions. Earlier (before the interview) you told me you were thinking about revolutionary prospects in Africa. Can you explain?

KH: I believe that Africa can only develop if it gets rid of its existing national political systems. That is not to say it will or must, but the vast majority of ordinary Africans suffer unnecessarily from the restrictions imposed on them by these regimes. I have looked at revolution in some classical European-North American examples. The point is that, in many places, the revolution only came after a prolonged period of trying to establish new economic connections. So, for example, in

Germany, in 1818, they founded a customs union (Zollverein), and made a few Hohenzollern dependencies to join. Over the next fifty years they added groups of people, who sometimes left because they thought the arrangement was unfair. But the project of a national economy was developed and identified as such. At the end of it all they created the German empire.

The timing and sequence was very similar with the European common market after the Second World War, which began with just half a dozen countries in the 1950s. By the end of the century, it was a fully-fledged political union of most European countries. That kind of free-trade movement for the home market will involve participation from different African groups in highly selective ways. But a kind of war will develop between the two main sides—those that seek to maintain traditional imperialist ties and national state structures, and others who seek to replace these with more inclusive associations based on trade.

LC: Who do you think these people are going to be in the case of Africa?

KH: Imported Chinese cars are very expensive because of the costs of transport and political harassment after they have arrived in Africa. If the Chinese are as powerful as they are and if they're aiming at expanding the African market for their goods, they have a direct interest in overriding these impediments to internal trade. Therefore, if the Chinese turned against this kind of national political class and its more traditional supporters in Western foreign capital, that would lead in the end to a kind of war. Similarly, the German Zollverein was designed essentially to unite Germans against Austria and keep Austria out. Even though there were not significant wars between German states in this period, there were wars between coalitions of German states and the Austrians at various times.

My aim is not to predict who the parties will be, but my fundamental bet is that a large number of Africans and some of their foreign supporters will want less harassment and more freedom of movement over an expanded area and with fewer political impositions on their activities.

LC: What is going to be the role of liberalism in all this?

KH: In Africa and any other region that is subjected to a kind of pre-capitalist regime, the principal interest of the most number of people is to increase their own freedom of movement and freedom of property. That is the classical purpose of a liberal revolution.

LC: But isn't there a danger in using the liberal revolutions of Europe to predict this?

KH: You tell me how many liberal revolutions have already taken place in history and where they can be found. There have been liberal revolutions in Latin America, Bolivar around the 1820s. I have lived for eighteen years in France and ten years in America. I'm very interested in these countries and have read a lot about their history. It is not that they offer a blueprint for it, but they offer much food for thought that contradicts prevailing orthodoxy. I can give you an example.

I wrote a piece for a French leftwing book called *Is there an Emancipatory Project for the 21st Century?* They asked me to write something about Africa. So I wrote a piece and they said, "We really like it, Keith, but we don't understand how you can have free trade and protection." I pointed out that when all these countries and regions got their act together, they wanted to expand and consolidate the home market and to offer some degree of protection for improved economic access in the world economy.

Ha-Joon Chang, a Korean economist from Cambridge, wrote a book called *23 Things You Never Knew About Capitalism*, arguing that the experience of the Southeast Asian tigers was basically building their development around protection of home industry. Industrialization is a model that can be exported to regions like Africa today. While my examples are from early in nineteenth-century Europe rather than 1950s Asia, it does not really change the usefulness of being able to think through these historical cases.

LC: Let us talk further about developmentalism in Africa and the possibility of the Asian developmental model being transposed there.

KH: The aim of the developmental state in the post-war period would be to create the largest possible free trade area within Africa itself or several of them and to impose protection barriers around them. Based on the examples that I am aware of, the size of this free trade area would be expanded over time or it could shrink or whatever.

The whole point about liberal free trade development is reducing restrictions on movement within a given area and harmonizing tariffs and regulations to improve the possibility of internal trade and movement. But along with this, the cold winds of the world market have to be held at arm's length at least for some period before they can be selectively relaxed.

LC: This raises the question of the political form that would organize such a free trade area. What we have at the moment is a number of free trade areas without a political form. The European Union is one exception to that, but others like Mercosur and NAFTA do not have strong political rules behind them.

KH: I don't know if you've heard of a French agricultural activist called Jose Bove. He runs a coalition of small farmers and urban environmentalists and consumers. Jose Bove was asked by somebody, "Aren't you worried about these eastern European farmers coming and the cutting the prices available to your French farmers?" He replied, "The big problem is corporate-driven global free trade." He went on, "I want the largest regional associations possible. I want the largest European association so that we can resist the ability of corporations to dictate global prices. I'm happy to help the Africans or Latin Americans to develop similar things."

What we cannot anticipate is the political forms that would accompany this attempt to consolidate and protect home markets. The point about the post-War period is that for thirty years, everywhere in the world—whether they were Stalinist state socialism, Western-style industrial welfare states, or postcolonial states—they all took the same form.

LC: Namely?

KH: Developmental states. I'm interested in opening up a debate on how people imagine political possibilities. Ha-Joon Chang's Korean model is rather restrictive and there are many people in Africa who would say, "We have to follow the Koreans or the Chinese in order to develop a more politically centralized system."

Development is more piecemeal and complex than that. When I talk about an African trade union or whatever, many Africans assume that I mean the African Union, all the heads of government meeting

and signing pieces of paper. But the vision of history that I have is of something much more dirty, messy, and piecemeal, with a few people coming together, fighting each other, breaking up, disappearing, and so on.

LC: Any piecemeal history will of course include grassroots social movements.

KH: Definitely.

LC: What kind of movements do you see supporting or advocating the kind of Africa that you envision?

KH: The formal structures of political power and many of informal applications within them and across nation-state boundaries are extremely onerous for people. I mean, Southern Africa has three out of the five most costly monetary transfers between two countries in the world—led by South Africa and Zambia.

I know someone from Zimbabwe who couldn't transfer money between South Africa and home. His family had returned from London and he had to get money to them. He ended up having to give cash to mini bus drivers—with a considerable risk of nobody ever seeing the money again. Also, the example of M-Pesa in Kenya, mobile phone money, has alleviated the burden of everyday life for so many Kenyans just by allowing them to make money transfers through mobile phones. No other form of digital transfer has a direct payment system built in. The Internet doesn't, for example. With phones, they get an instant acknowledgement of the transfer.

Imagine what it is now like. In parts of Kenya, a peasant may have to go fifty kilometers to pay his annual taxes, local taxes. He may be kept waiting for two days by some bureaucrat who simply wants to make his life difficult. That guy can now transfer the cash without leaving his home and in ways that are extremely reliable.

I am not suggesting necessarily that the vehicles for this kind of enhanced liberalism will take the form of social movements, but once people realize that there are ways of living in this world that do not involve the kind of shit they once had to put up with, really, they will take it.

LC: So this is an optimistic account.

KH: It is not optimistic in the sense of predicting what will happen. I want to write something that will show people how they could have a different future than the one they think is inevitable.

LC: So it's normative?

KH: Certainly normative. What I'm claiming, if you like, is that movement is a human right; it is a universal human right and movement around the planet should not be controlled by territorial states who have the right to shake us down whenever they feel like or to decide whether we can move or not into their territory.

All of this adds up for me to a Kantian cosmopolitan idea. I envisage a new free trade movement at a global level which says, "We have to do something about these territorial states which are making it difficult for us to move." And a place like Africa could easily be in the vanguard of such a movement.